North Devon Council

Report Date: Council – Wednesday 6th April

Topic: A new access off Alexandra Road – options report

Report by: Head of Place, Property and Regeneration – SarahJane Mackenzie-Shapland

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Future High Street Fund (FHSF) is a central government fund that seeks to support, renew and reshape high streets in a way that drives growth, improves experience and ensures future sustainability.

1.2 On the 26th December 2020 it was announced that Barnstaple had been provisionally awarded £6,548,876. This represents 69% of the original ask. At Full Council in February 2021, members agreed to amend the capital programme and to increase it to £10,943,000 with the Council funding £4,394,124 through external borrowing.

1.3 This project will deliver the following interventions:
- The Pannier Market/Guildhall and Former abattoir,
- The acquisition and development of 36/37 Boutport Street,
- The access and reconfiguration of Queen Street/Bear Street car park
- Pedestrianisation (10am – 4pm) and public realm improvements to Butchers Row and Cross Street.

1.4 An early iteration of the project had indicated a potential new access into the Queen Street/Bear Street car park from Alexandra Road but this was removed because of concerns related to cost (only £320,000 of the overall capital budget was attributed to the total car park costs).

1.5 At a recent meeting a number of Members considered that a new access from Alexandra Road had a critical role in the success of this project; directing traffic from the inner relief road into this car park and then driving footfall on into the town centre.

1.6 It was agreed that officer's would scope the possibilities for an access off Alexandra Road together with costings and bring this back to Members for consideration.

1.7 This report sets out the results of this scoping exercise for Members to consider.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS
   2.1. If members wish to proceed with an access from Alexandra Road into the Queen Street/Bear Street car park, that option 1 (a or b to be confirmed) is progressed.
   2.2. That subject to 2.1, Council vary the capital programme by up to £495,000 and funds be released to enable the delivery of a new access from Alexandra Road to the new Queen Street/Bear Street car park.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS
   3.1. Of the 3 options tested; options 1 (a and b) and 3 were considered technically sound.
   3.2. Option 3 would allow traffic movements in to the car park from both directions but will require traffic signals and at an estimated cost of £993,000 is considered a very expensive and over-engineered solution.
   3.3. Option 1 will deliver a left in and out junction only, but still provides an access from Alexandra Road, directing traffic straight off the inner relief road but in a much less engineered manner than option 3 and at half the cost (estimated to be up to £495,000).
   3.4. Given that option 1 provides a technically sound access, it is considered much better value for money and officers would recommend that members progress with option 1.

4. REPORT
   4.1. Following initial reporting on the Future High Street Fund project to members, it was requested that officers consider including a new vehicular access into the Queen Street/Bear Street car park off Alexandra Road.
   4.2. Given the close link to work already being undertaken for the Future High Street Fund, the appointed consultants for that project; Clarke Bond (engineers), were asked to consider whether an access from Alexandra Road would be possible.
   4.3. In December 2021, a Scoping Note for the traffic assessment of the proposed new access junction was prepared for discussion and agreement with Devon County Council (DCC), as the local highway authority. This identified three possible access options on Alexandra Road as follows: 1. A left turn only access junction. 2. A priority junction with a right turning lane (ghost island) permitting all turning movements. 3. A signalised access junction permitting all turning movements. For all three options, the Bear Street and Queen Street accesses would remain in use. For each option, the effect upon the operation of the Alexandra Road/Bear Street signalised junction to the north of the proposed access would be assessed.
   4.4. The acceptability of the options was modelled on all traffic using Alexandra Road (as requested by DCC as the ‘worst case scenario’), which would never

be the case in reality given that the Bear Street and Queen Street access will remain available.

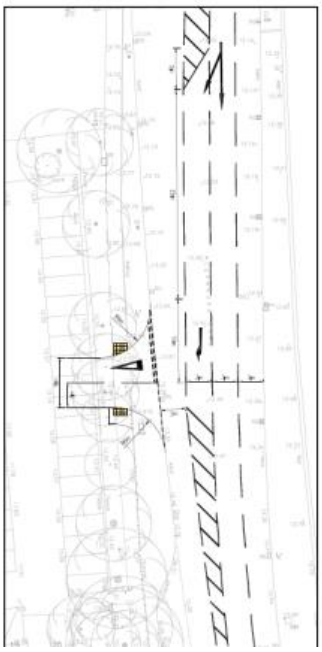
4.5. Taking each option in turn:

Option 1 – A left in and left out option. Two versions have been identified. Option 1a uses the existing lay-by and converts it into a slip road where option 1b retains the existing lay-by and then proposes a build out beyond which access to the car park is proposed. The two options are identified on the drawings below:

Option 1a Option 1b

4.6. The modelling of both option 1a and 1b show an acceptable impact both on queuing in the locality and on the Alexandra road/Bear Street junction.

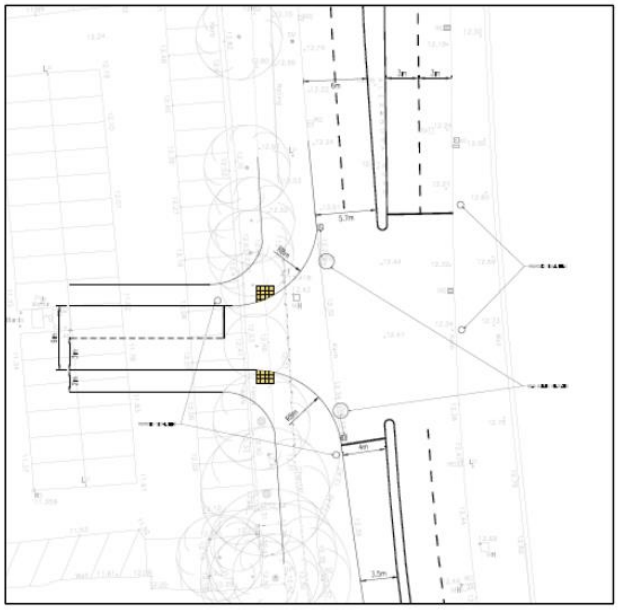
4.7. Option 2 considered a priority junction with a right turning lane (ghost island) permitting all turning movements. This is as identified in the drawing below:



Option 2 – a ghost island allowing all movements.

4.8. Option 2 has been modelled and would result in excessive queues for vehicles attempting to exit the car park. It is not considered an option that can be progressed.

4.9. Option 3 modelled, a signalised access junction permitting all turning movements and is identified on the following drawing:



Option 3 – A signalised junction

DCC requested that the signalised access junction and the Alexandra Road/Bear Street junctions be assessed as a linked junction. The results show that the proposed signalised car park access junction operates below

90% of its theoretical capacity on all approaches. Queuing and delays on Alexandra Road, particularly in the morning peak hour, will potentially affect the operation of the Alexandra Road/Bear Street junction.

4.10. The modelling report provided by Clarke Bond summarises the results for each option as follows:

• **Option 1** – The access junction works well but the Alexandra Road/Bear Street junction operates closer to theoretical capacity than in 2022 without the proposed access.

• **Option 2** - The access junction does not operate within capacity but the Alexandra Road/Bear Street junction operates well within capacity with only marginally higher queuing and delays than the 2022 baseline scenario.

• **Option 3** – The access junction operates within capacity but the Alexandra Road/Bear Street junction operates with marginally higher queuing and delays than the 2022 baseline scenario.

The following table considers the options and their impact on the Alexandra Road/Bear Street junction:

Scenario	DOS	Queues	Delays	Acceptable?
Access Junction				
Option 1	71% PM	2.3 PM	30.79 PM	Yes
Option 2	261% PM	64.6 PM	2577.26 PM	No
Option 3	89.9% AM	20.5 AM	30.3 PM	Yes
Alexandra Rd/Bear St Jn				
2022 Baseline	70% AM	11.4 AM	38.8 AM	N/A
Option 1	88.8% PM	19.5 PM	40.4 PM	Yes
Option 2	81.2% PM	14.1 PM	53.6 PM	Yes
Option 3	85.0% AM	11.7 PM	60.4 AM	Yes

Clarke Bond advise that it is important to reiterate that the traffic flows used in the assessment are based upon the assumption that all vehicles will enter and exit the car park via Alexandra Road, which clearly will not happen in reality as the Bear Street and Queen Street accesses will still be available to use. This approach was agreed with DCC to enable a “worst case” assessment of the proposed junction options.

4.11. Clarke Bond conclude that their modelling shows that Option 2 should be discounted as it does not provide adequate capacity. However, both Option 1 and Option 3 could provide a satisfactory form of vehicle access to the improved car park and it is likely that these junctions would actually operate more efficiently in reality than suggested for the reason noted above.

4.12. Alongside this technical modelling exercise, these options have been costed by Gates consultants; the Quantity Surveyors for the Future High Street Fund project. The options have been costed as follows:

Option	Cost	Technically Sound
Option 1a	£495,000	Yes
Option 1b	£466,000	Yes
Option 2	£477,000	No
Option 3	£993,000	Yes

In each scenario, Gates have assumed £190,000 towards utility diversion (included in the cost shown in the table above) and we await final confirmation of this from the suppliers. At the time of writing it is unclear whether fees are included and this will be reported to members at Council.

4.13. The borrowing costs for each scenario have been run and can be summarised as follows (over a 40 year borrowing period, in line with the current borrowing model for the Future High Street Fund project):

Option 1a – £495,000 – annual borrowing cost = £24,998
Option 1b – £466,000 – annual borrowing cost = £23,533
Option 2 – £477,000 – annual borrowing cost = £24,089
Option 3 - £993,000 – annual borrowing cost = £50,146

4.14 When the borrowing costs were modelled for the main Future High Street Fund project, officers did not take into account any potential uplift in income that could be received as a result of the improvement works to the wider town centre and the Queen Street/Bear Street revenue income that is currently received. It is anticipated that a new, better car park and spaces with a much more visible access (assuming more spaces used and higher utilisation) could 'grow the current revenue income' received on this car park which could offset the increased borrowing costs above. Currently the Queen Street car park has 224 car parking spaces with a pay and display income level of £485,000 and the Bear Street car park has 166 car parking spaces with a pay and display income level of £138,000. This highlights the potential additional income that could be generated from the Bear Street spaces in particular. The overall objective of the Future High Street Fund project is to increase footfall to the town centre and so we would reasonably expect increased income and not just additional income displaced from other car parks in the town.

4.15 If members would wish to pursue a new junction from Alexandra Road having considered both the technical results and the associated costing, officers would suggest that we proceed with option 1 (either a or b depending on local consultation), that the capital programme is amended and that this scheme is then incorporated into the scope of the Future High Street Fund project.

5. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS
   5.1. If members decide to proceed with option 1, the scheme will require up to £495,000 of additional capital budget as identified in the main body of the report to be funded through external borrowing.
   5.2. The annual revenue costs of the external borrowing are shown in 4.13
   5.3. Resources from the Place, Property and Regeneration Service who are leading on the Future High Street Fund project, together with legal and financial resources will be required to proceed with this project.

6. EQUALITIES ASSESSMENT
   6.1. The Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) for the Future High Street Fund project will be updated to have regard to this additional element of work.

7. ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
   7.1. The Environmental Assessment for the Future High Street Fund project will be updated to have regard to this additional element of work.

8. CORPORATE PRIORITIES
   8.1. What impact, positive or negative, does the subject of this report have on:
      8.1.1. The commercialisation agenda:
         The proposal would increase the borrowing costs to the Council but it is anticipated that this intervention would increase the success of the Future High Street Fund project, generate additional revenue income which in turn and in time would contribute positively to the Commercialisation agenda.
      8.1.2. Improving customer focus:
         The proposal would improve the experience for customers (visitors and residents alike) visiting the town centre.
      8.1.3. Regeneration or economic development:
         It is considered that this project would enhance the Future High Street Fund project; driving traffic off the inner relief road and in to the heart of our new scheme.

9. CONSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT
   9.1. Article 4.5.15
   9.2. Referred or delegated power: Delegated

10. STATEMENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY
   This report contains no confidential information or exempt information under the provisions of Schedule 12A of 1972 Act.

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS
   The background papers are available for inspection and kept by the author of the report.

12. STATEMENT OF INTERNAL ADVICE

The author (below) confirms that advice has been taken from all appropriate Councillors and Officers:

Cllr Robbie Mack – Ward member

Cllr David Worden – Leader

Cllr Malcolm Prowse – Lead member for Economic Development and Strategic Planning policy

Ken Miles – Chief Executive

Jon Triggs – Director of Resources and Deputy Chief Executive

Simon Fuller – Senior Solicitor

Nikki Gordon – Head of Organisational Development

Helen Bond – Property Manager

Tara Jenkins – Senior Engineer